

Heber Creeper Railroad Line
Following the course of the Provo River
Between Provo and Heber City
Provo Vicinity
Utah County
Utah

HAER No. UT-63
HAER
UTAH
25-PROVO. V,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Heber Creeper Railroad

HAER No. UT-63

HAER
UTAH
25-PROVO. V)
1-

Location: The Heber Creeper Railroad originally ran between Provo and Heber City, Utah, by following the course of the Provo River through Provo Canyon, Wasatch and Utah counties, Utah. The track has been removed, and the route between Provo and Olmstead has been obliterated. However, the route between Olmstead and Heber City is still evident.

UTM: 12/444630/4462800
12/464170/4484000

Quad: Heber City, Utah
Charleston, Utah
Aspen Cove, Utah
Bridal Veil Falls, Utah
Orem, Utah

Date of Construction: 1899

Present Owner: Utah Transportation Commission
4501 South 2700 West
Salt Lake City, Utah

Present Use: None; abandoned railroad grade.

Significance: The Heber Creeper Railroad was the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railway Company's branch line from Provo to Heber City. Constructed in 1899, it stimulated the economy of Heber City and opened trade into the Uintah Basin.

Historian: Jonathon C. Horn
Alpine Archaeological Consultants, Inc.

June 1991

I. HISTORY

A. General Information

The Heber Creeper Railroad was the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railway's (Rio Grande Western) branch line through Provo Canyon to Heber City. This standard gauge line began in the city of Provo, followed the Provo River east into the Wasatch Mountains through Provo Canyon and the present area of Deer Creek Reservoir to Heber City. The steep grade, a 1,000-foot elevation gain in 23.8 miles, and the winding route necessitated slow speeds, resulting in it being known as the "Heber Creeper."

B. Construction Chronology

Bids for grading the first six miles of the Heber Creeper Railroad grade, from Provo to the mouth of Provo Canyon, were opened on February 27, 1899. The contract for this segment was given to Deal Bros. & Mendenhall of Springville, Utah, [1] with Dave Huffaker and Fred Barbin of Midway, Utah, apparently subcontracting some of the work. [2] Construction was overseen by M. Fitzpatrick, Superintendent of Construction for the Rio Grande Western. [3] Work progressed very quickly, with over 100 teams of horses and 200 laborers busy with the grading. [4] By the middle of April, this section of grade was ready for track laying. [5] Track was completed to the mouth of the canyon by May 3, 1899, and it was also reported that the bridge at the canyon mouth, presumably at Olmstead (see HAER No. UT-63-C), had been completed by that date. [6]

Grading of the second leg of the route, through Provo Canyon to within one-half mile of Deer Creek, was awarded to Deal Bros. & Mendenhall and a company by the name of Roylances. [7] Again, Huffaker and Barbin subcontracted some of the work. [8] The only serious accident reported during the construction of the line occurred in this stretch. On April 17, 1899, men working for the Rio Grande Western set off an explosive charge to remove a large overhanging rock above the grade without warning men working below. A falling rock seriously injured Peter McGouren, possibly fatally, when it struck him on the head. Less seriously injured was Arthur Bird who was thrown from an ore car and run over when the horse pulling it ran away. This apparently caused very hard feelings toward the Rio Grande Western workers, since both injured men worked for Deal Bros. [9]

No definite plans were released for the construction of the line between Deer Creek and Heber City. In mid-May 1899, railroad officials visited Heber City. They indicated that they would like the town and surrounding citizens to make concessions to them to extend the line the rest of the way to Heber City. This was to be in the form of donations of right-of-way and land for a depot. If no concessions were made, the railroad indicated that no further work might be done on the line in the near future. [10] This was a form of blackmail commonly used by railroad companies of the time, knowing that small communities desperately wanted to be connected by railroad so that they might prosper. Apparently the ploy worked. In August 1899, it was reported that the depot building at Heber City was under construction. Stockyards were also built and the railroad was busy trying to line up all of the cattle and sheep shipping business in the area. [11] The railroad was completed to Heber City at 2:00 p.m. on September 21, 1899, with the first shipment of sheep scheduled to go out two days later. [12]

A day of celebration took place on September 29, 1899. Seven passenger cars brought 400 visitors from Provo, Springville, Salt Lake City, and other nearby towns to Heber City. Among the dignitaries that participated were Acting Governor J. T. Hammond, State Senator A. O. Smoot, and Mayor Jones of Provo. The visitors were accompanied from the depot to the courthouse yard by the Heber Brass Band. Speeches were made by various dignitaries, followed by lunch in Heber Hall and a dance in Turner's Hall that evening. [13]

Construction of Deer Creek Dam, beginning in 1938, necessitated movement of the track westward out of the pool area of the reservoir. [14] This was done between 1939 and 1941 and resulted in relocation of the track from just below Deer Creek Dam to within 1-1/2 miles of Heber City, where it joined the original route. [15]

C. Effect of the Railroad

Completion of the railroad into Heber City brought expectations of great economic prosperity for the region. The Wasatch Wave reported,

The advent of the railroad into this valley marks its history, the dawn of a new era. Railroads are country developers; they give a stimulus to trade and put life into industries; they open up new fields of labor, new industries, and new possibilities throughout all the labyrinths of trade, labor, and commerce; they make it possible for the people to open up mines, quarries, factories, foundries, etc., where the same had been impossible before. [16]

Although the line was never extended beyond Heber City into the Uintah Basin, the railroad made trade into the Uintah Basin possible and opened the area to agriculture. [17] The majority of business generated by the railroad was focused on use of the area's natural resources, principally sheep and cattle grazing. [18] During the 1930s, the stockyards at Heber City shipped more sheep than any other station in the country. [19] In 1963, it was reported that "Advancements in truck transportation and the convenience of automobile travel has cut deeply into the railroad's business, so that the train makes only one run into the valley each week at present." [20] Soon thereafter, the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railway Company requested that they be permitted to abandon the line. Since 1971, recreational use of the line from Bridal Veil Falls and later Vivian Park to Heber City has stimulated the economy of Heber City by bringing thousands of tourists each year to the town. If, as is expected, the train does not run in 1991, Heber City will certainly be adversely affected economically.

D. Stations

Seven stations were established along the new line in 1899. In order, from Provo, these were Smoot (1 mile), Crayhurst (6 miles), Nunn (9 miles), Falls (10 miles), Forks (12 miles), Wallsburg (18 miles), and Charleston (21 miles). [21] Several of these locations have subsequently been known by other names. Smoot, apparently named for State Senator A. O. Smoot seems to have later been known as Falls. [22] Crayhurst may be present-day Olmstead at the mouth of Provo Canyon. Nunn is also referred to as Nunn's and Falls, later referred to as Upper Falls, is Bridal Veil Falls. Forks is present-day Vivian Park. When the railroad

was moved because of construction of Deer Creek Reservoir, Wallsburg and Charleston were both bypassed, though the community of Charleston continued to be served by a new Charleston Siding.

E. Denver and Rio Grande Western Railway Company

The Denver and Rio Grande Western Railway Company, known more familiarly as the Rio Grande Western, was incorporated in 1881 as a subsidiary of the Denver and Rio Grande Railway of Colorado. The company was active in building railroads through Utah, challenging the monopoly of the Union Pacific. All indications point to the Rio Grande Western alone being responsible for the construction of the branch line to Heber City. There is some question as to the involvement of the Utah Eastern Railway Company in the building of the branch line to Heber City, at least for the upper 15 miles of the route. The Utah Eastern Railway Company began in 1879 as a means to bring coal to Salt Lake City at a reasonable cost, breaking the hold of the Union Pacific which was transporting coal from southwestern Wyoming. [23] Track was laid from Coalville, Utah, to Park City, but the line was never completed to Salt Lake City and was soon abandoned. [24] Newspaper accounts suggest that the branch line from Provo to Heber City was built entirely by the Rio Grande Western and David Johnson, author of "The History and Economics of Utah Railroads," reports he was unable to document the Utah Eastern Railway Company as ever having been built to Heber City. [25] The Utah Eastern Railway Company was bought by the Rio Grande Western on January 31, 1900, so after the branch line to Heber City was completed. [26] Carr and Edwards indicate that the Utah Eastern Railway Company was a subsidiary of the Rio Grande Western, organized for construction of the branch line to Heber City. [27] There does not seem to be any documentation to support this. Since the Utah Eastern Railway Company was not bought by the Rio Grande Western until after the line to Heber was completed, any involvement by the Utah Eastern Railway Company is in doubt unless it was very obscure and on paper only.

By 1900, George Gould had gained control of the Denver and Rio Grande Railway Company. In hopes of putting together a coast-to-coast rail network, he bought the Rio Grande Western on May 15, 1901, merging them as the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railway Company. Financial problems plagued the conglomerate until it was reorganized in 1920, still under the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railway Company name. In 1967, the company filed for abandonment of the line; [28] this was granted in 1969. [29]

F. Recreational Use

Abandonment of the route spurred the local communities to try to find a way to keep the line to Heber City open. Ownership of the grade transferred to the Utah Transportation Commission who leased the route to the Wasatch Mountain Railway Commission in 1971 for recreational excursions on the Heber Creeper between Bridal Veil Falls and Heber City. [30] This was the only scenic railroad in operation in the State of Utah. In 1989, the scenic railroad was operated by New London Railroad and Village, Inc., with over 50,000 passengers a year taking the trip. [31] Soon after excursions began from Bridal Veil Falls, the track between Provo and Bridal Veil Falls was removed. From the Olmstead Bridge westward, the grade has been paved with asphalt for use as a bicycle path. The section between the Olmstead Bridge and Bridal Veil Falls is in use as an unimproved bicycle path and jogging

trail. An avalanche damaged and partially covered a portion of the tracks between Bridal Veil Falls and Vivian Park in 1986. The costs of repair exceeded the capabilities of the concessionaire, so trips were run from Vivian Park rather than from Bridal Veil Falls. Because of financial problems, it does not appear that scenic railroad excursions will take place on the Heber Creeper in 1991.

G. Future Use

As part of their project improving U.S. Highway 189, the Utah Department of Transportation is planning to construct an 8-foot-wide asphalt bicycle and jogging path on the railroad grade between the Olmstead Bridge and Vivian Park. This will require the removal of track, grading, and asphalt surfacing between Bridal Veil Falls and Vivian Park. The Bridal Veil Falls to Vivian Park section of the grade is documented as part of this package as HAER No. UT-63-A. The Olmstead Bridge, Canyon Glen Bridge, and Vivian Park Bridge will be redecked, resurfaced, and have handrails added. The Olmstead Bridge and Vivian Park Bridge have been determined to be eligible to the National Register and are documented as parts of this package as HAER Numbers UT-63-C and UT-63-B.

II. **ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION**

A. Physical Description

The Heber Creeper Railroad originally measured 23.8 miles from Provo to Heber City. It was a standard gauge track, 56-1/2 inches between 52 pound rails. The rails are anchored by tie plates and spikes to wooden 8 x 8 inch, creosote treated, railroad cross ties spaced from 5 to 14 inches apart. The grade itself is earth and stone with ballast of crushed rock and is typically 12 to 14 feet wide. The grade is a combination of cut and fill, depending on the topographical situation. It steadily climbs just over 1,000 feet in Heber City. Between 1939 and 1941, construction of Deer Creek Reservoir required that the upper portion of the grade be moved westward, out of the pool area of the new reservoir. The grade was realigned from just below Deer Creek Dam to within 1-1/2 miles of Heber City, where it rejoined the original route.

Several bridges are present along the route of the Heber Creeper Railroad grade. The Olmstead Bridge (42UT609) is the first crossing of the Provo River near the mouth of Provo Canyon. Documentation of this bridge is included in this package as HAER No. UT-63-C. About two miles upstream of the Olmstead Bridge is the Canyon Glen Bridge, (42UT610), also over the Provo River. This is a heavily modified structure that apparently replaced the original Howe truss bridge in or before 1939. It has been determined to be not eligible for inclusion in the National Register. [32] Two miles above Bridal Veil Falls at Vivian Park is the Vivian Park Bridge. This crosses the South Fork of the Provo River and has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register. [33] It is included in this package as HAER No. UT-63B. About two miles above Vivian Park, the railroad again crosses the Provo River over what is called the Fisherman's Bridge (42WA113). This is a wood-tie deck trestle bridge that replaced an original Howe truss in 1913. It is considered National Register-eligible but will not be considered further in this document, since it will not be impacted by the current project undertakings. [34] Where the Heber Creeper diverges from

its original alignment below Deer Creek Reservoir, it crosses over U.S. Highway 189 on an open deck railroad overpass (42WA114) constructed in 1939. This structure has been determined to be not eligible for inclusion in the National Register. [35]

B. Railroad Grade Segments

The Heber Creeper Railroad can be divided into five segments. The first segment (Segment 0), between Provo and the Olmstead Bridge (HAER No. UT-63-C), has had the track removed and is largely obliterated. From the Olmstead Bridge to Bridal Veil Falls (Segment 1), the route is being used informally as an unimproved bicycle trail and jogging path. Track is intact from Bridal Veil Falls to Heber City. The original alignment from Bridal Veil Falls to where the railroad passes over Highway 189 below Deer Creek Dam, a distance of just over 6 miles, is Segment 2. Segment 3 is the realigned route from the railroad overpass, just below Deer Creek Reservoir, to the junction with the original route, about 1-1/2 miles southwest of Heber City. Segment 3 also includes the original alignment with track removed from the junction of the realigned track 1-1/2 miles southwest of Heber City southwest past the community of Charleston and into Deer Creek Reservoir. Segment 4 is the last 1-1/2 miles of the route into Heber City. Those portions of the Heber Creep Railroad grade that follow the original alignment and still have track in place have been considered eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. These are Segments 2 and 4. [36] The portion of Segment 2, from Bridal Veil Falls to Vivian Park is included in this package as HAER No. UT-63-A.

III. FOOTNOTES

- [1] The Wasatch Wave, Heber City, Utah, March 3, 1899, p. 3.
- [2] Ibid., June 2, 1899, p. 3.
- [3] Ibid., October 6, 1899, p. 3.
- [4] Ibid., March 31, 1899, p. 3.
- [5] Ibid., April 14, 1899, p. 3.
- [6] Ibid., May 5, 1899, p. 2.
- [7] Ibid., March 31, 1899, p. 3.
- [8] Ibid., June 2, 1899, p. 3.
- [9] Ibid., April 21, 1899, p. 3.
- [10] Ibid., May 12, 1899, p. 3.
- [11] The Wasatch Wave, Heber City, Utah, August 25, 1899, p. 3 and September 22, 1899, p. 3.
- [12] Ibid., September 22, 1899, p. 3.

- [13] Ibid., September 29, 1899, p. 3 and October 6, 1899, p. 2.
- [14] Stephen L. Carr and Robert W. Edwards, Utah Ghost Rails, Salt Lake City: Western Epics, 1989, p. 120.
- [15] Kenneth L. Wintch and Teri H. Christensen, "Determination of Eligibility and Finding of Effect for U.S. Highway 189, Utah Valley to Heber Valley, by the Federal Highway Administration, Utah Division, and the Utah Department of Transportation" (Salt Lake City, n.p., 1989), p. 11.
- [16] The Wasatch Wave (Heber City, Utah), September 22, 1899, p. 3.
- [17] David F. Johnson, "The History and Economics of Utah Railroads" (M.S. thesis, University of Utah, 1947), p. 65.
- [18] The Deseret News Press, "Under Wasatch Skies: A History of Wasatch County, 1858-1900," Salt Lake City: The Deseret News Press, 1954, p. 133.
- [19] Carr and Edwards, p. 120.
- [20] William James Mortimer, How Beautiful Upon the Mountains: a Centennial History of Wasatch County, Wasatch County Chapter, Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1963, p. 154.
- [21] The Wasatch Wave, Heber City, Utah, September 22, 1899, p. 3.
- [22] Donald B. Robertson, Encyclopedia of Western Railroad History: The Desert States: Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1986, p. 302.
- [23] Johnson, pp. 53-54.
- [24] Ibid., pp. 54-58.
- [25] Ibid., p. 59.
- [26] Robertson, p. 302.
- [27] Carr and Edwards, p. 120.
- [28] Carr and Edwards, p. 120-121.
- [29] Carr and Edwards, p. 120-121; and Wintch and Christensen, p. 11.
- [30] Ibid., pp. 11-12.
- [31] Anonymous, "Heber Creeper Provides Hands-on Experience for Railroad Buff," Missilani, 30(7), August 4, 1989, p. 7.

- [32] Wintch and Christensen, p. 27.
- [33] Ibid., p. 31.
- [34] Ibid., p. 36.
- [35] Ibid. p. 39.
- [36] Ibid., p. 13; p. 19.

IV. REFERENCES CITED

A. Primary and Unpublished Sources

1899 The Wasatch Wave, Heber City, Utah, 3, March 31; 14, April 21; 5, May 12, June 2, August 25; September 15, 22, 29; October 6.

B. Secondary Sources

Anonymous, "Heber Creeper Provides Hands-on Experience for Railroad Buff," Missilani, August 4, 1989, p. 7.

Carr, Stephen L. and Robert W. Edwards. Utah Ghost Rails. Salt Lake City: Western Epics, 1989.

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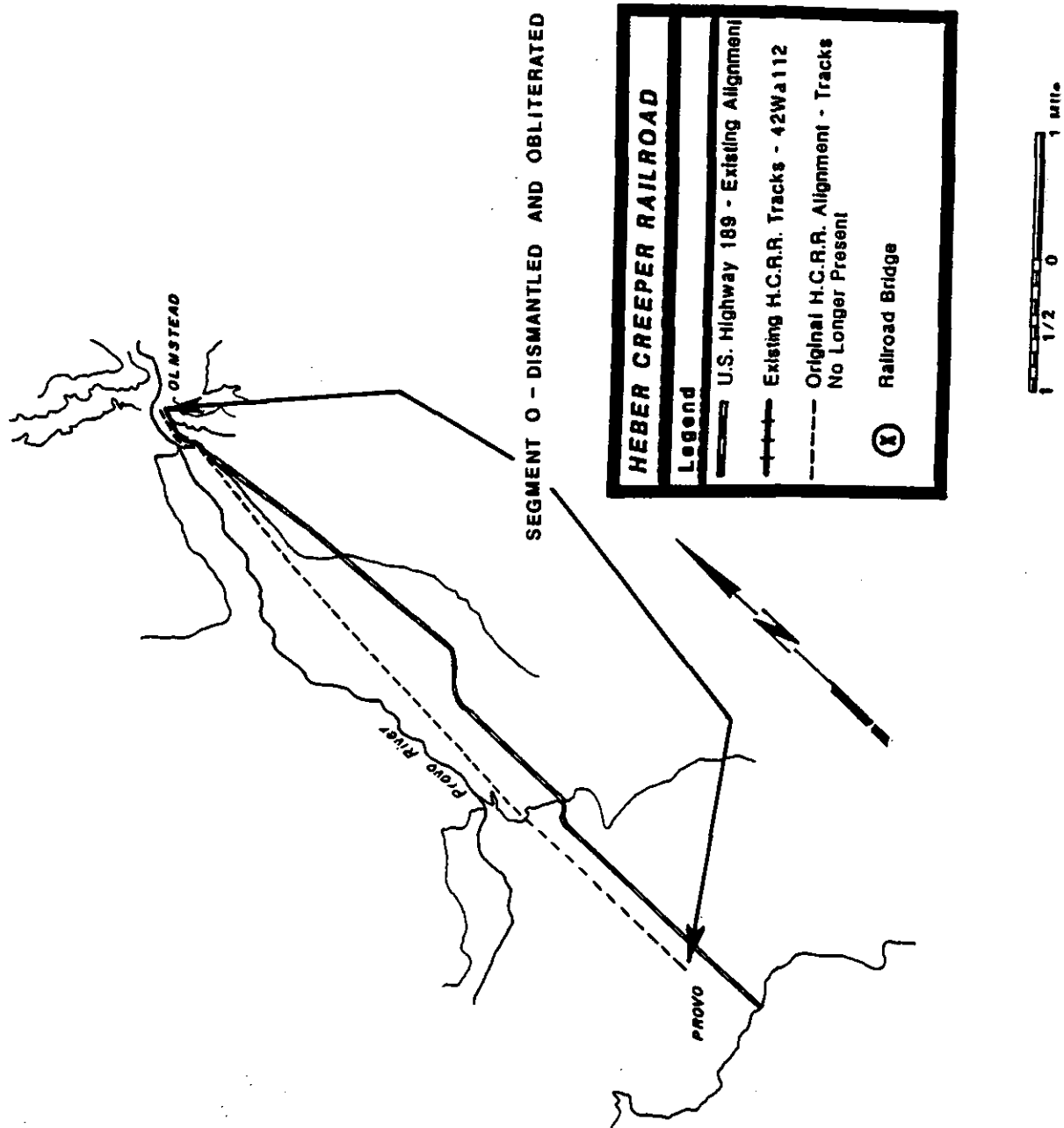
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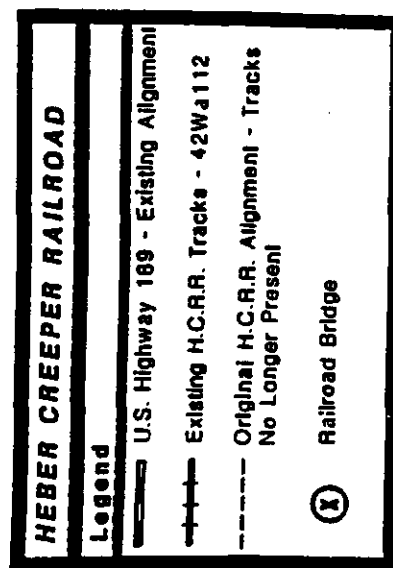
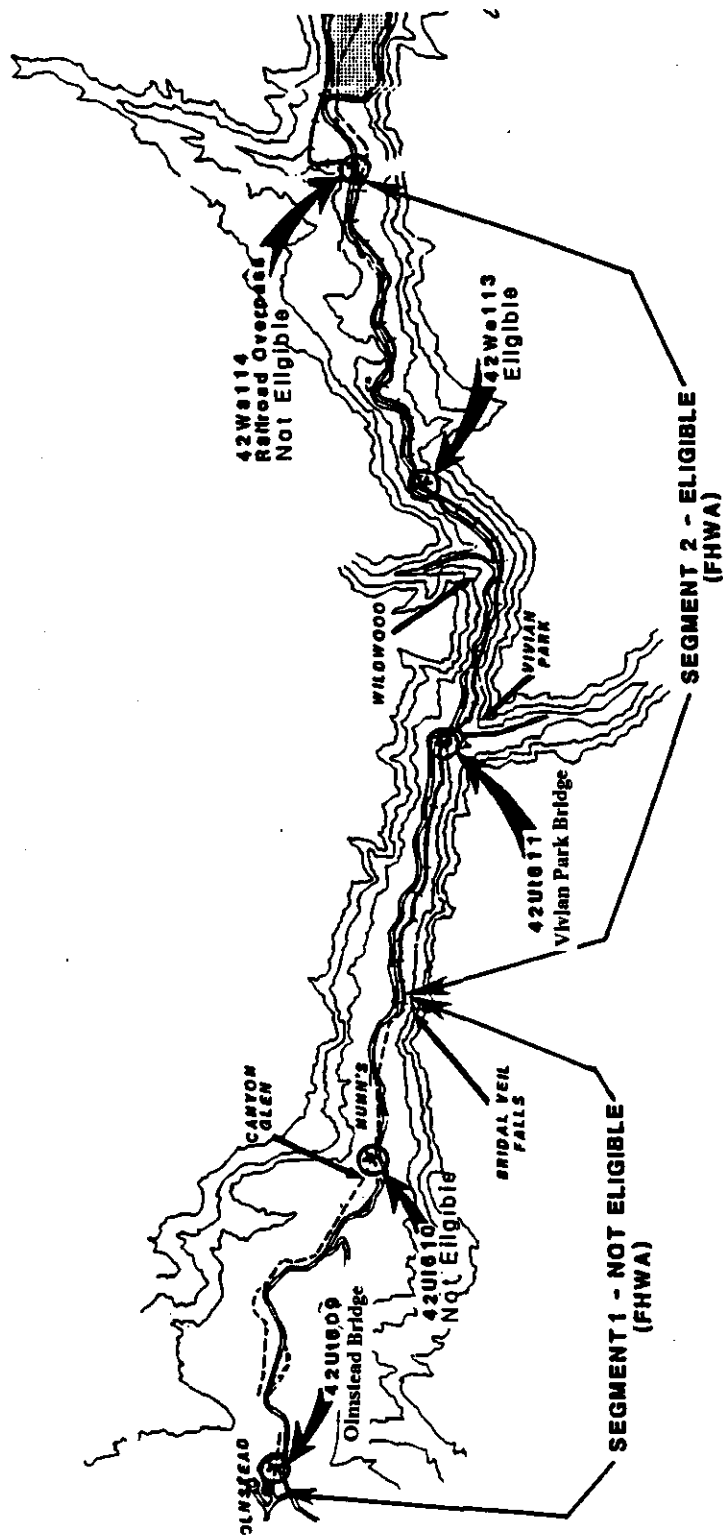
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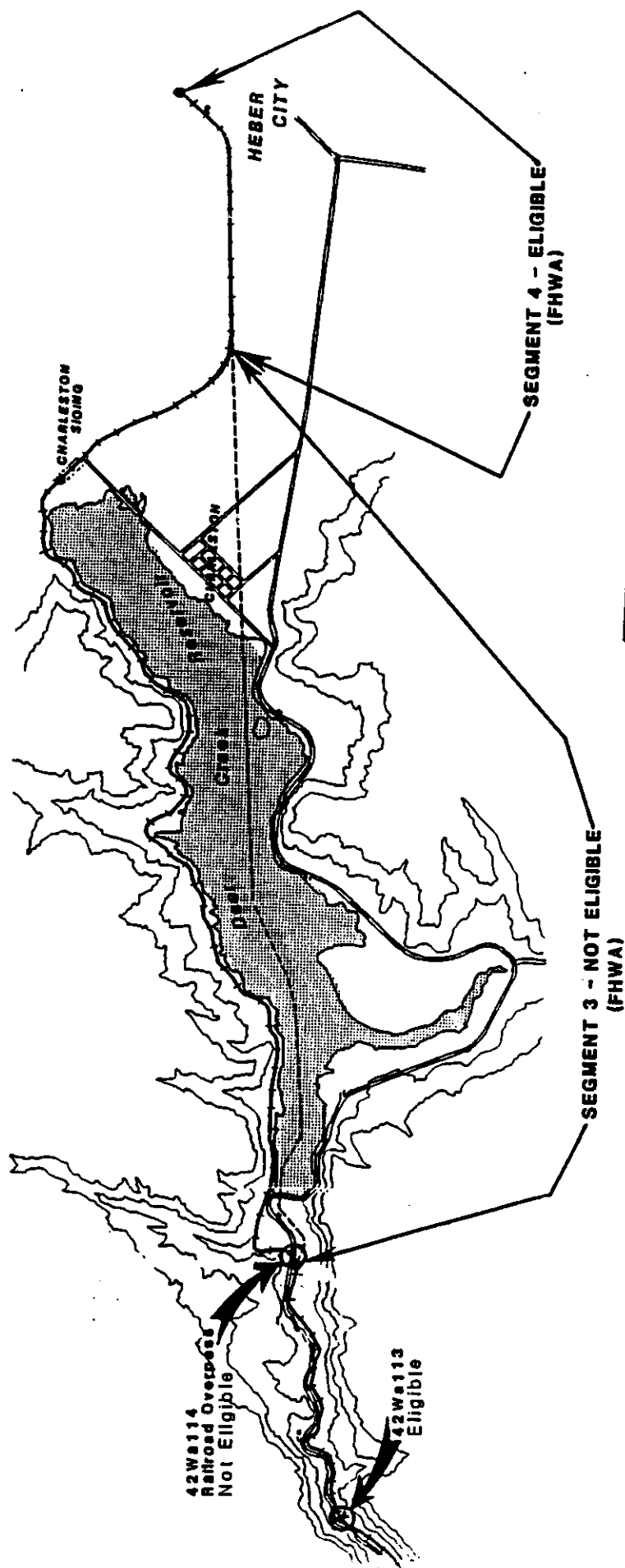
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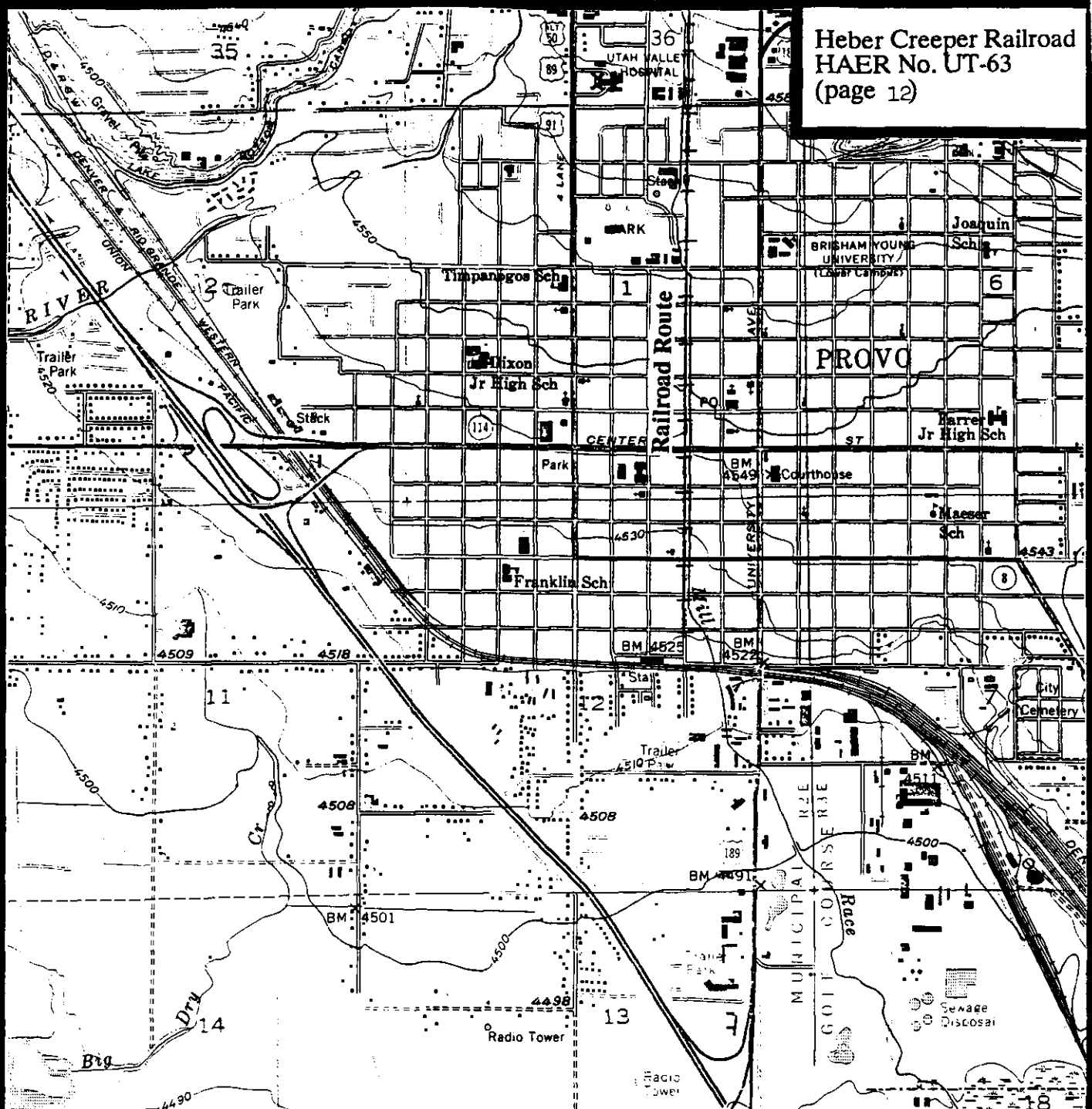






HEBER CREEPER RAILROAD	
Legend	
	U.S. Highway 189 - Existing Alignment
	Existing H.C.R.R. Tracks - 42Wa112
	Original H.C.R.R. Alignment - Tracks No Longer Present
	Railroad Bridge





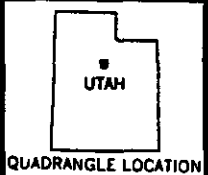
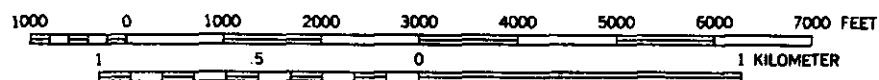
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T6-7S, R2-3E, SLC PM

HEBER CREEPER RAILROAD
HAER PACKAGE
NO. UT-63

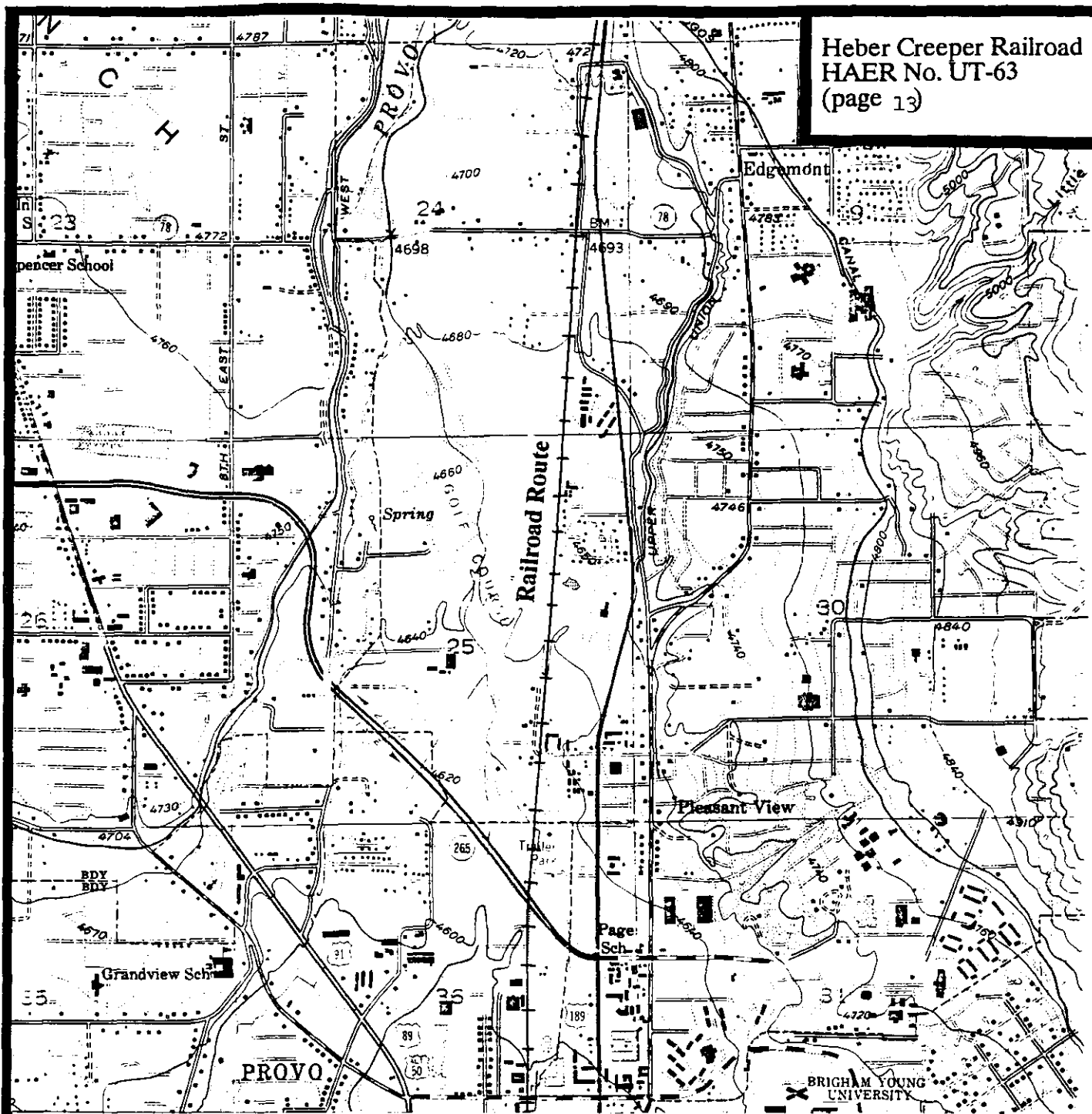
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SCALE 1:24,000



Route of Heber Creeper Railroad.



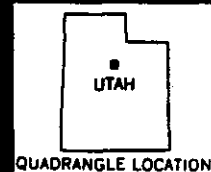
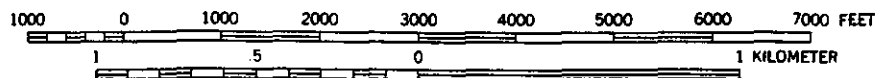
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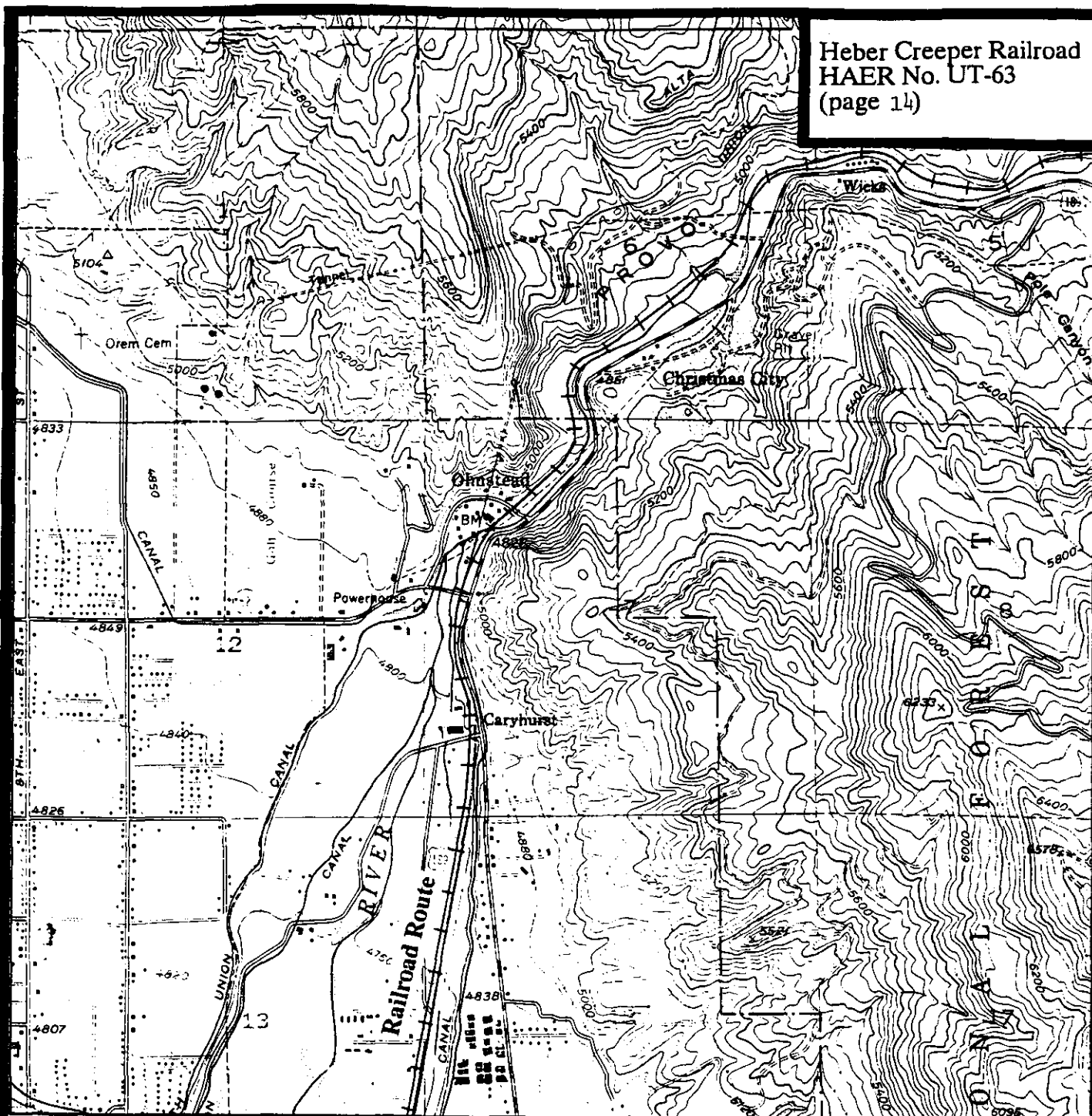
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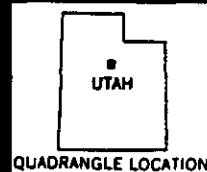
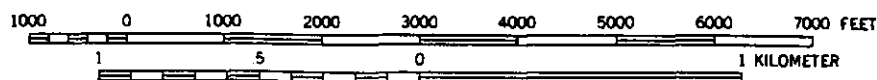
Orem, Utah (1948)
(photorev. 1969, 1975)
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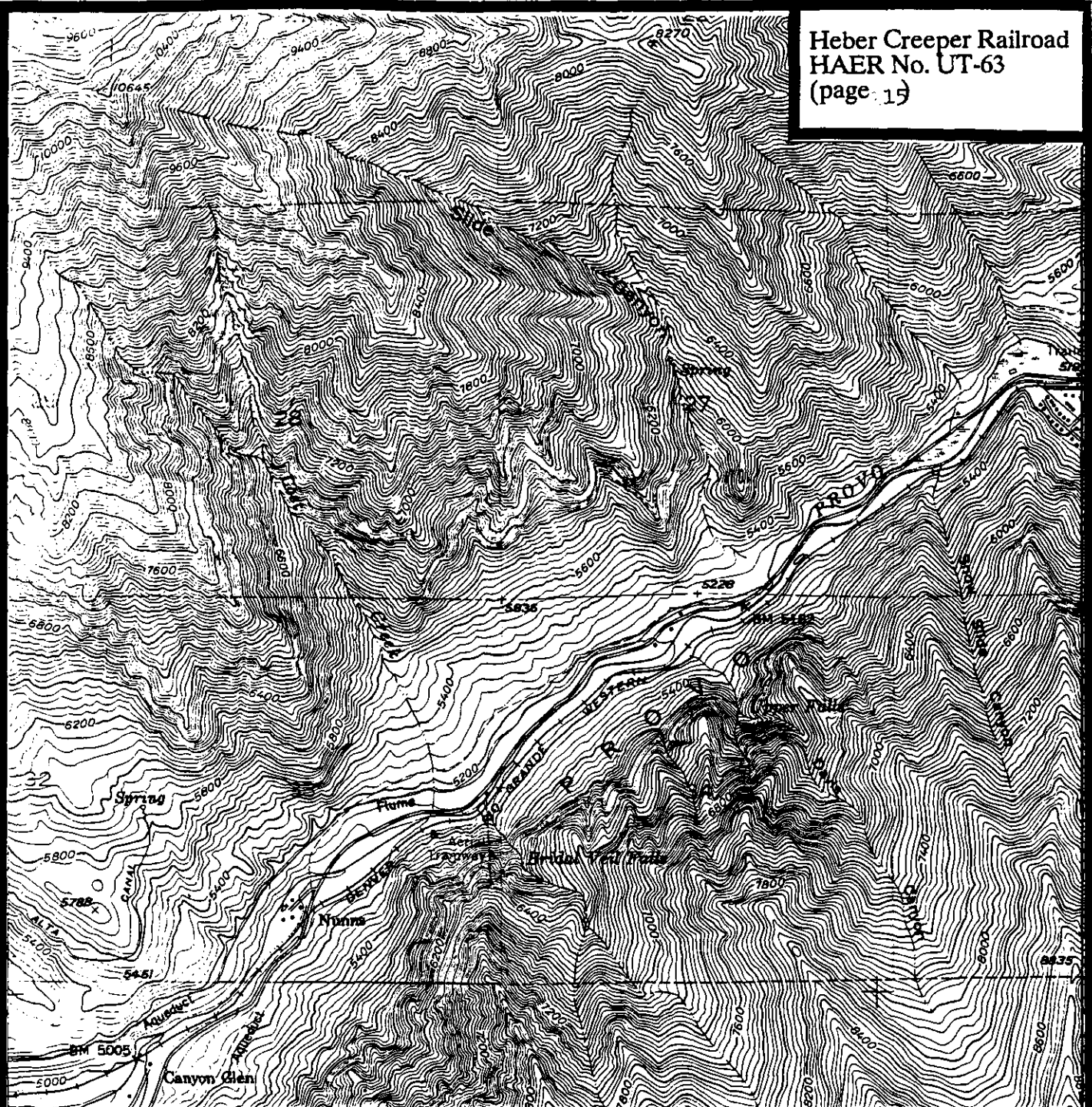


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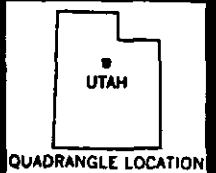
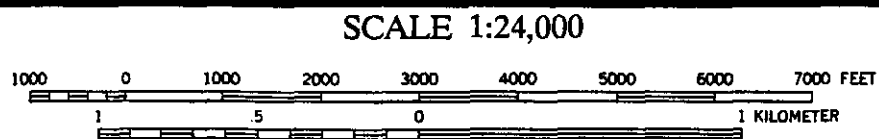
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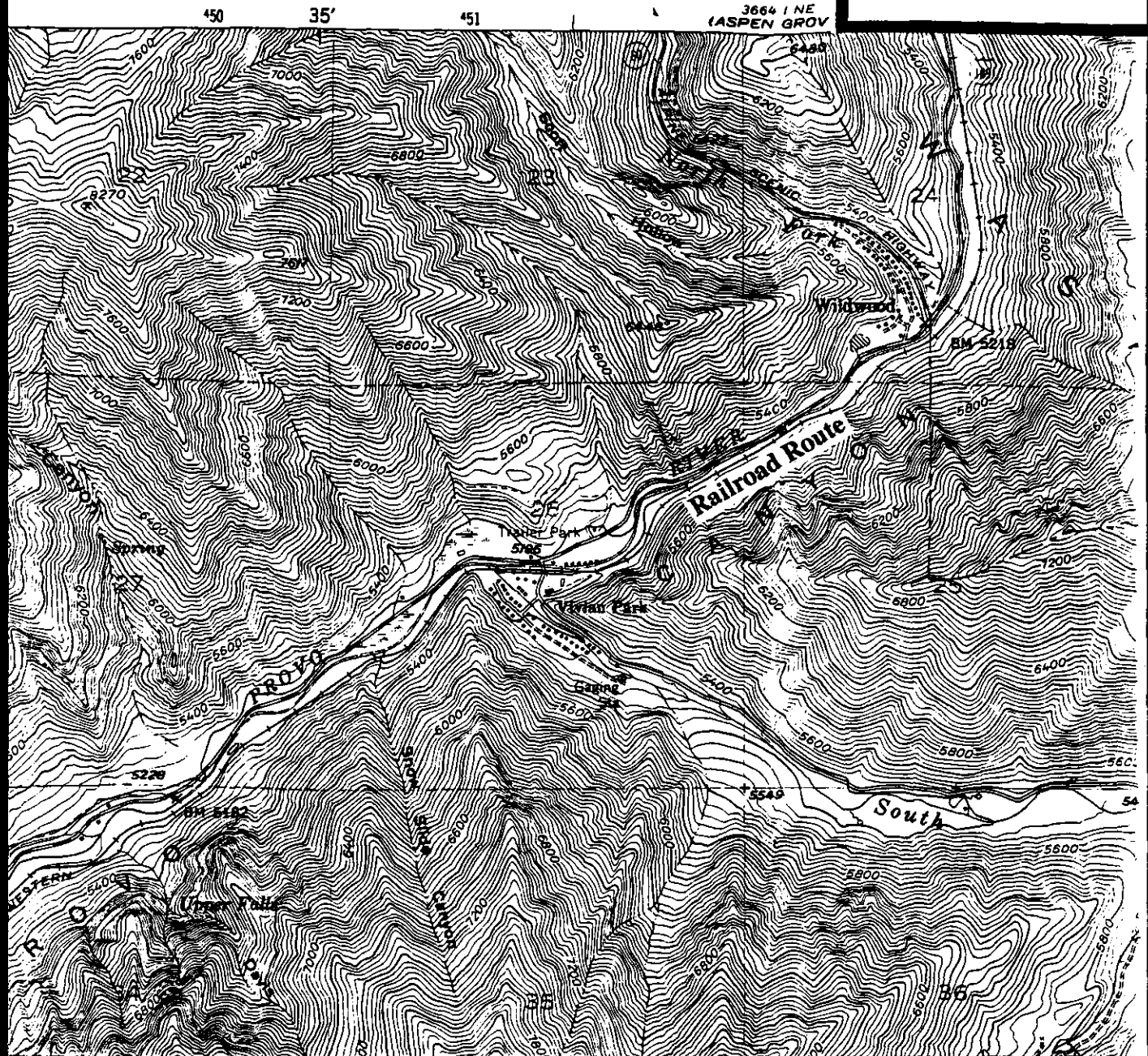
Bridal Veil Falls, Utah (1948)
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HAER PACKAGE
NO. UT-63**

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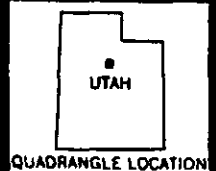
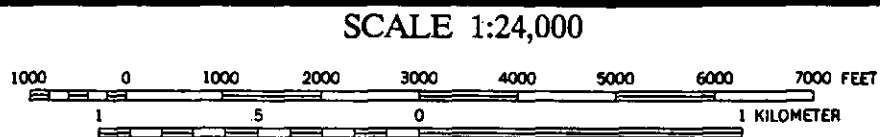
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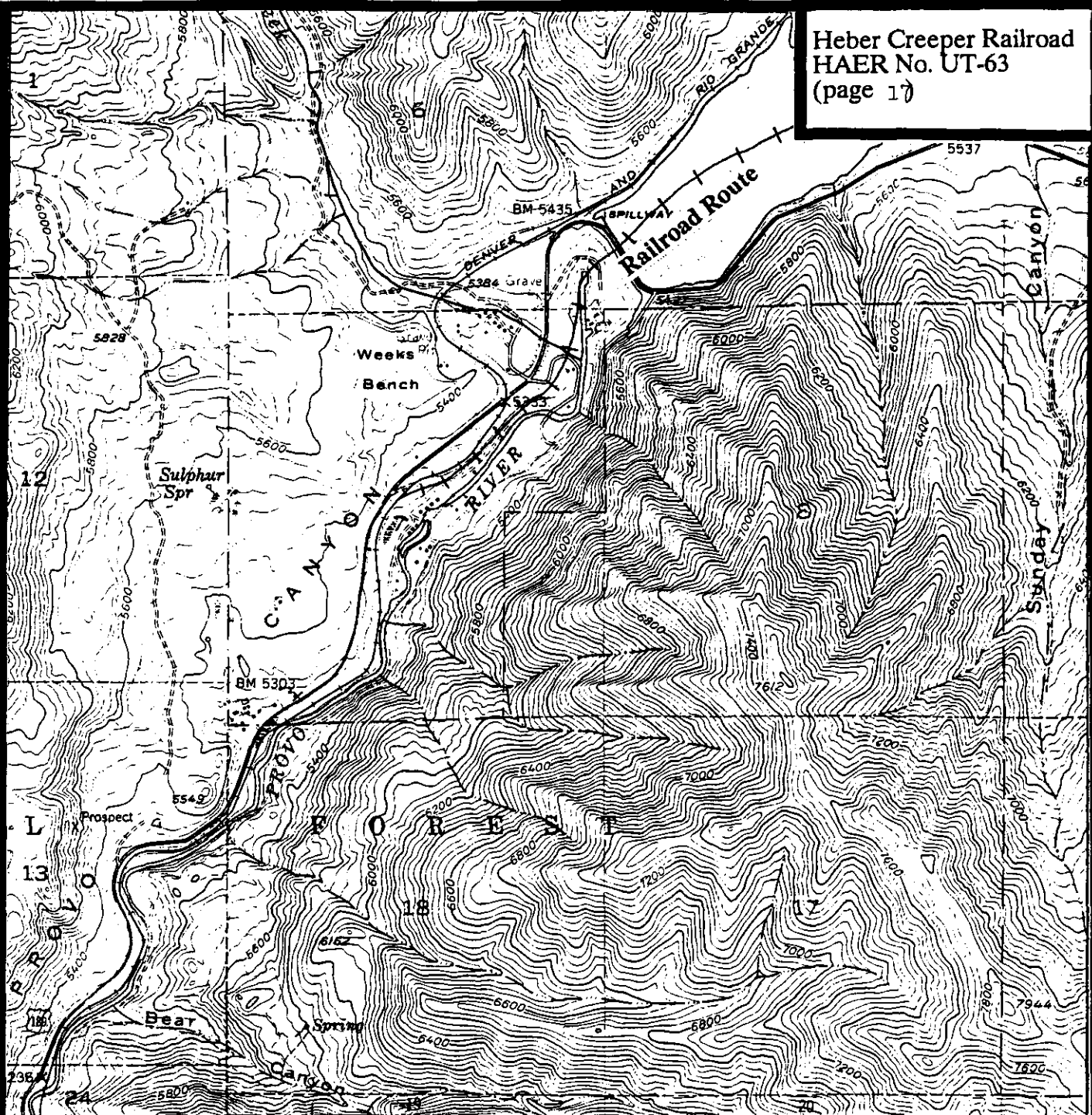
Bridal Veil Falls, Utah (1948)
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T5S, R3E, SLC PM

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Route of Heber Creeper Railroad.



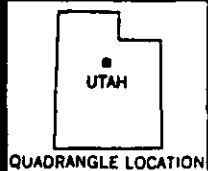
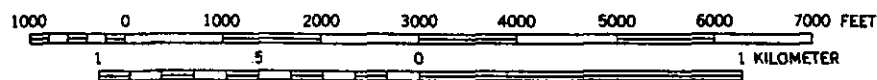
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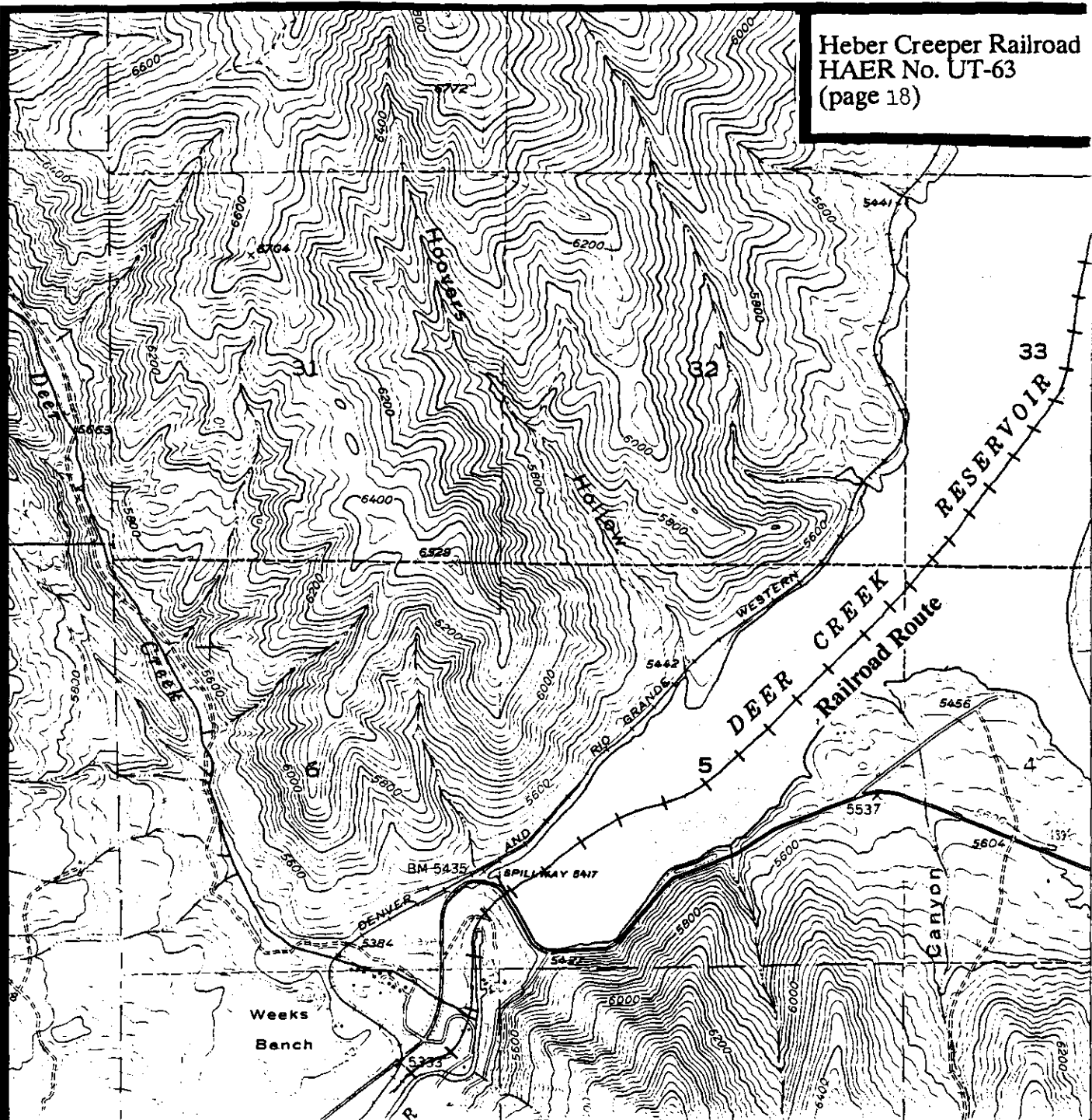


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QUADRANGLE LOCATION

Route of Heber Creeper Railroad.



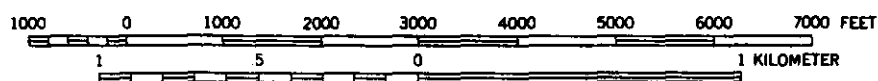
Aspen Grove, Utah (1948)
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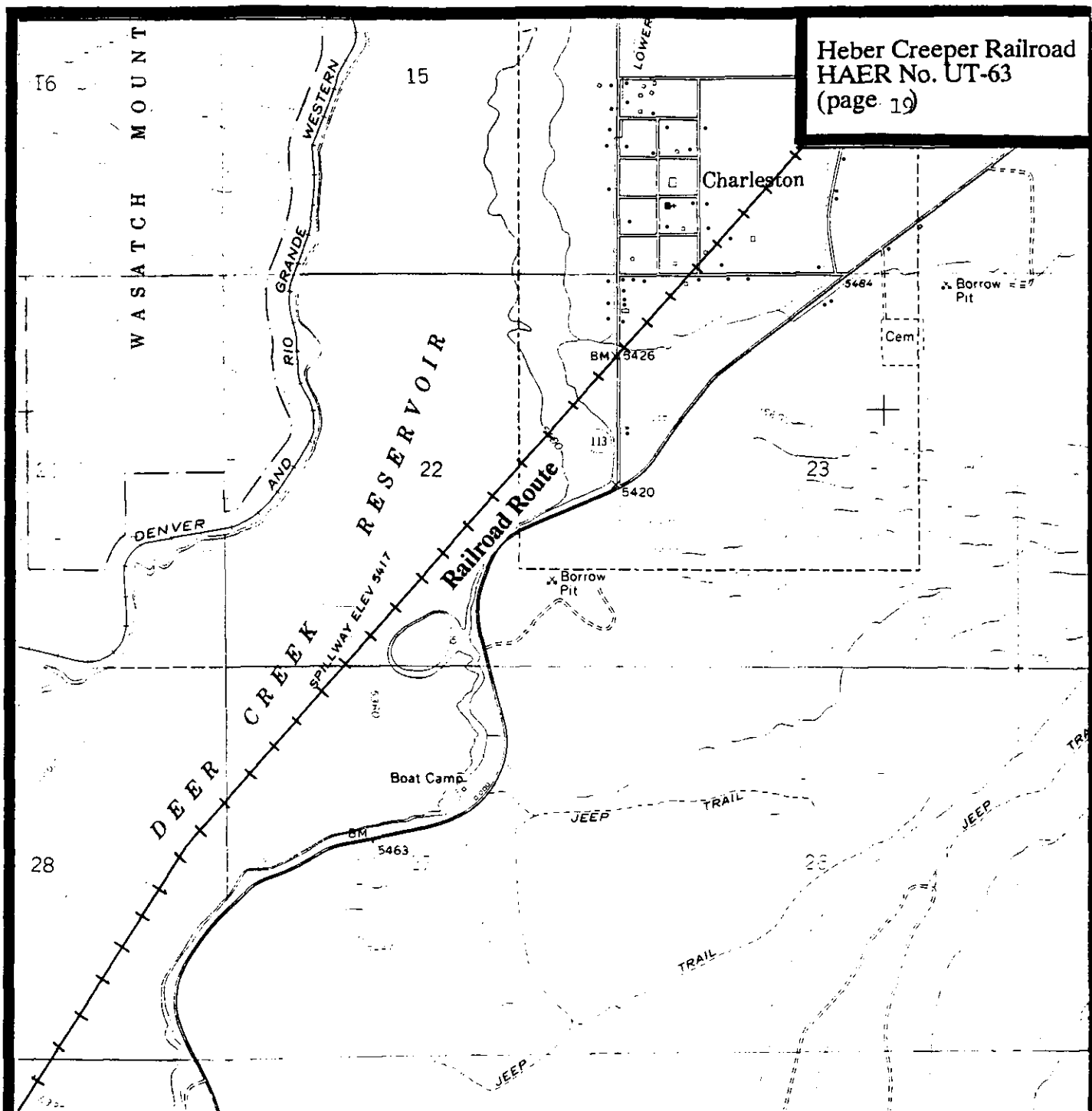


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QUADRANGLE LOCATION

Route of Heber Creeper Railroad.



Heber Creeper Railroad
HAER No. UT-63
(page 19)

Charleston, Utah (1966)

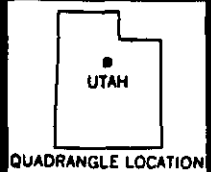
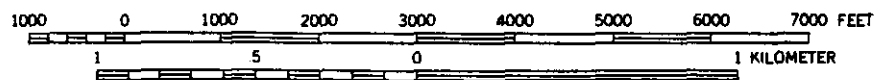
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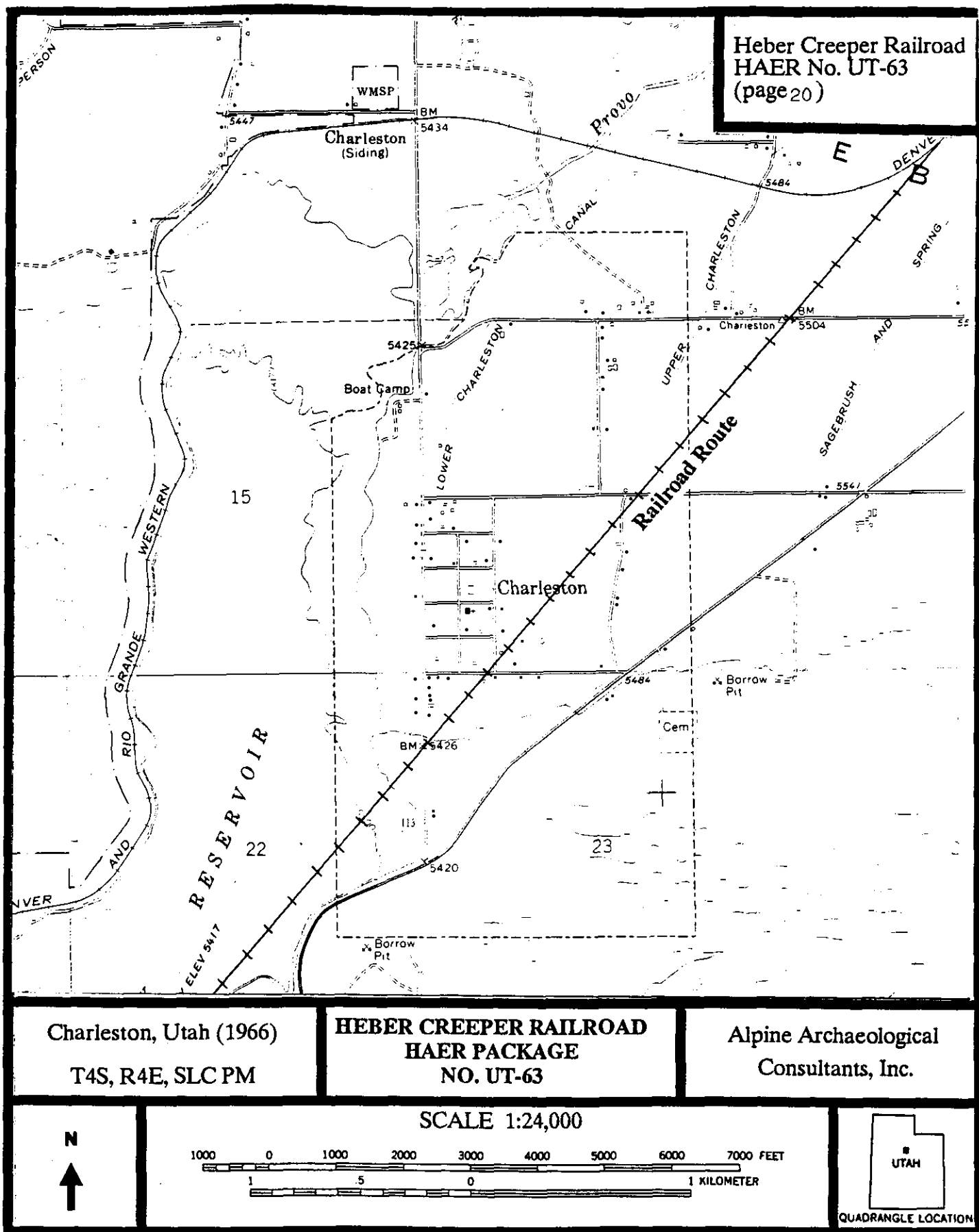


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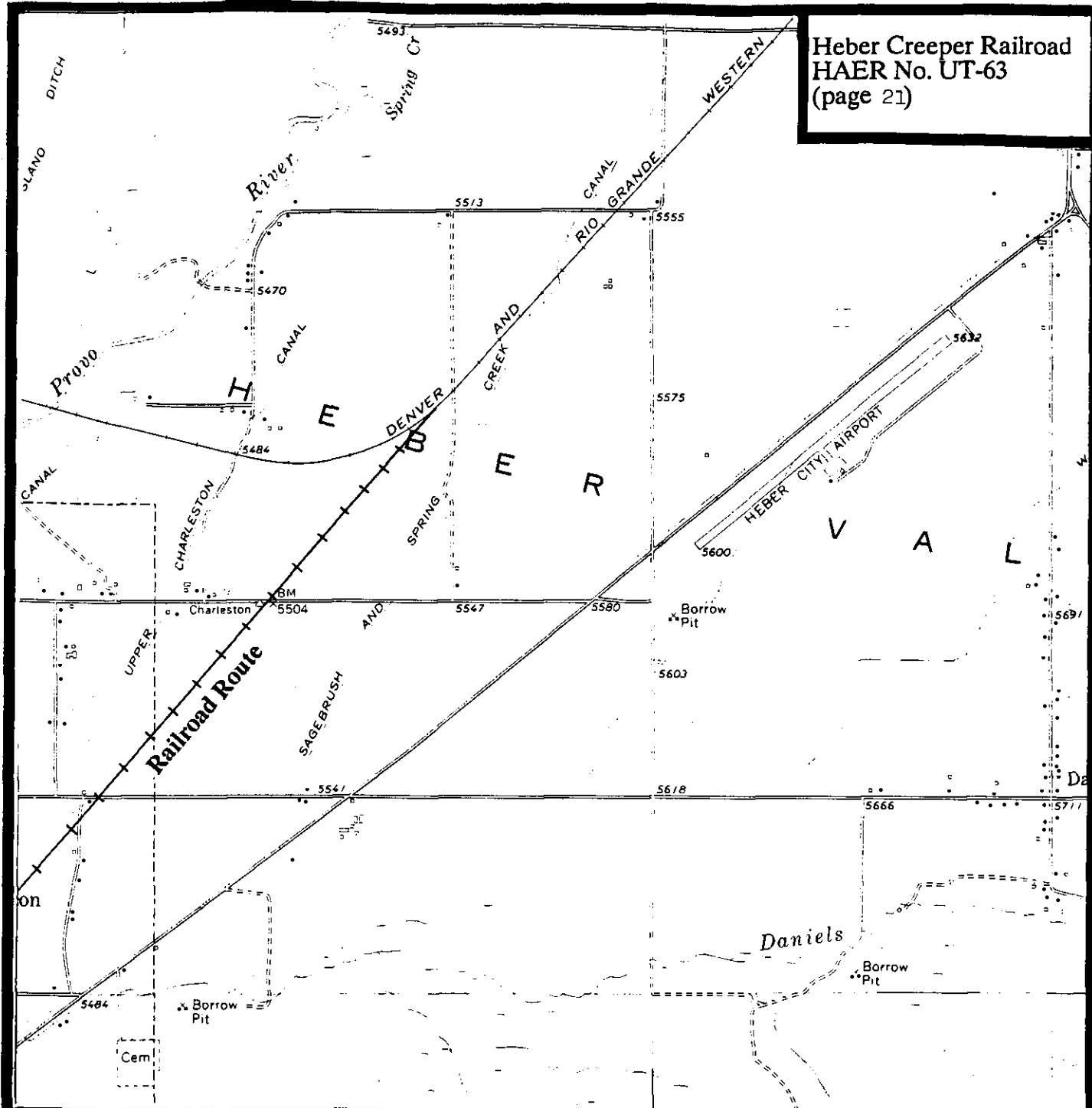


QUADRANGLE LOCATION

Route of Heber Creeper Railroad.



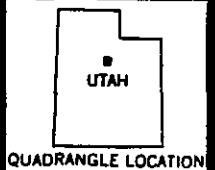
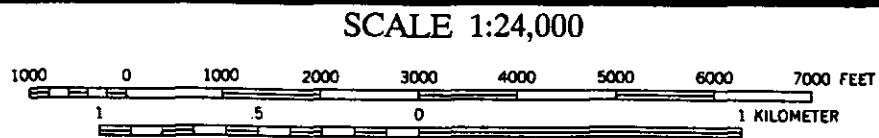
Route of Heber Creeper Railroad.



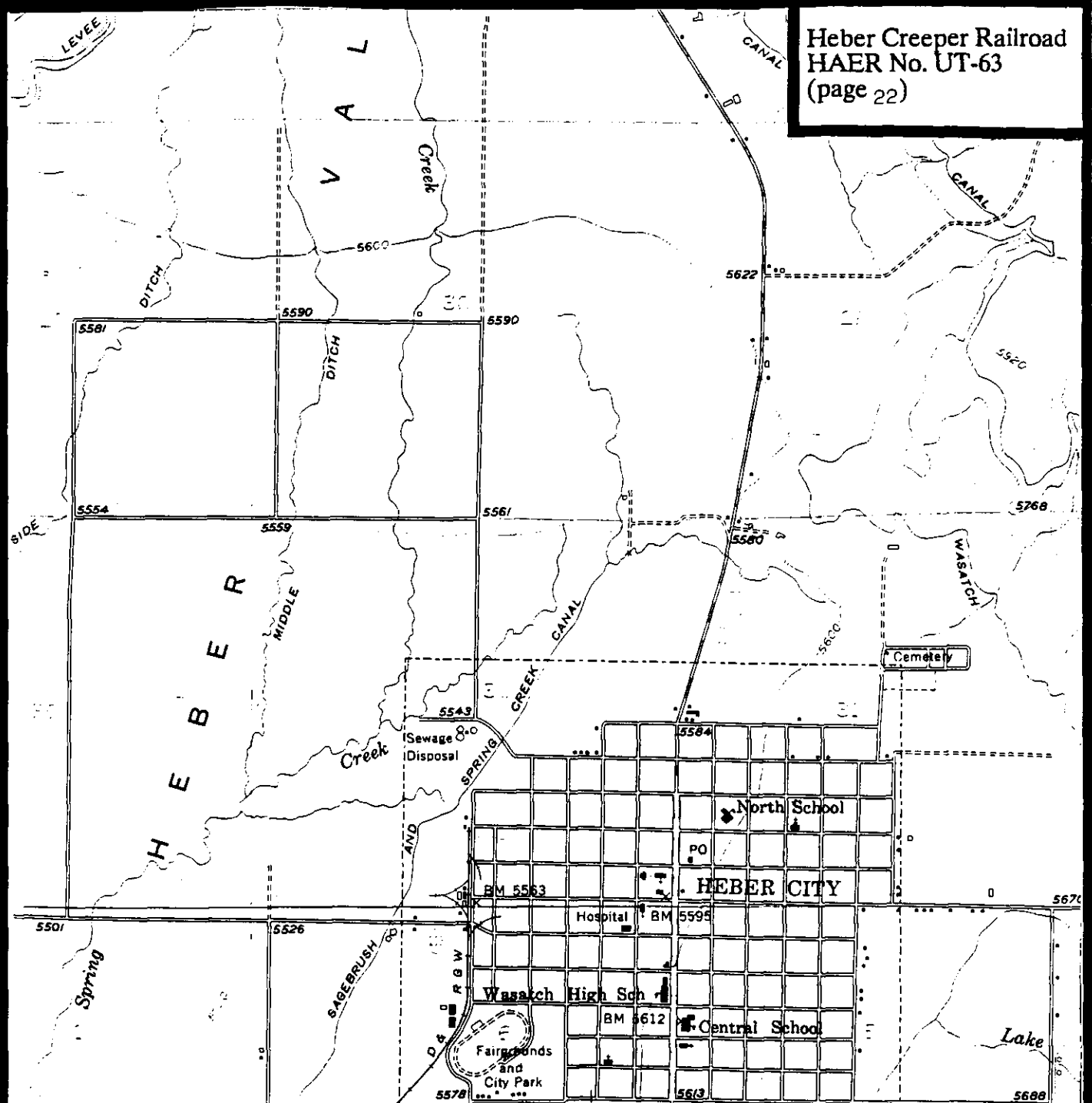
Charleston, Utah (1966)
T4S, R4-5E, SLC PM

HEBER CREEPER RAILROAD
HAER PACKAGE
NO. UT-63

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Route of Heber Creeper Railroad.



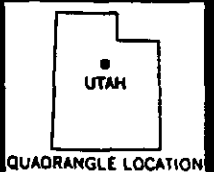
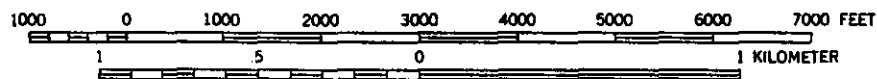
Heber City, Utah (1955)
T3-4S, R4-5E, SLC PM

**HEBER CREEPER RAILROAD
HAER PACKAGE
NO. UT-63**

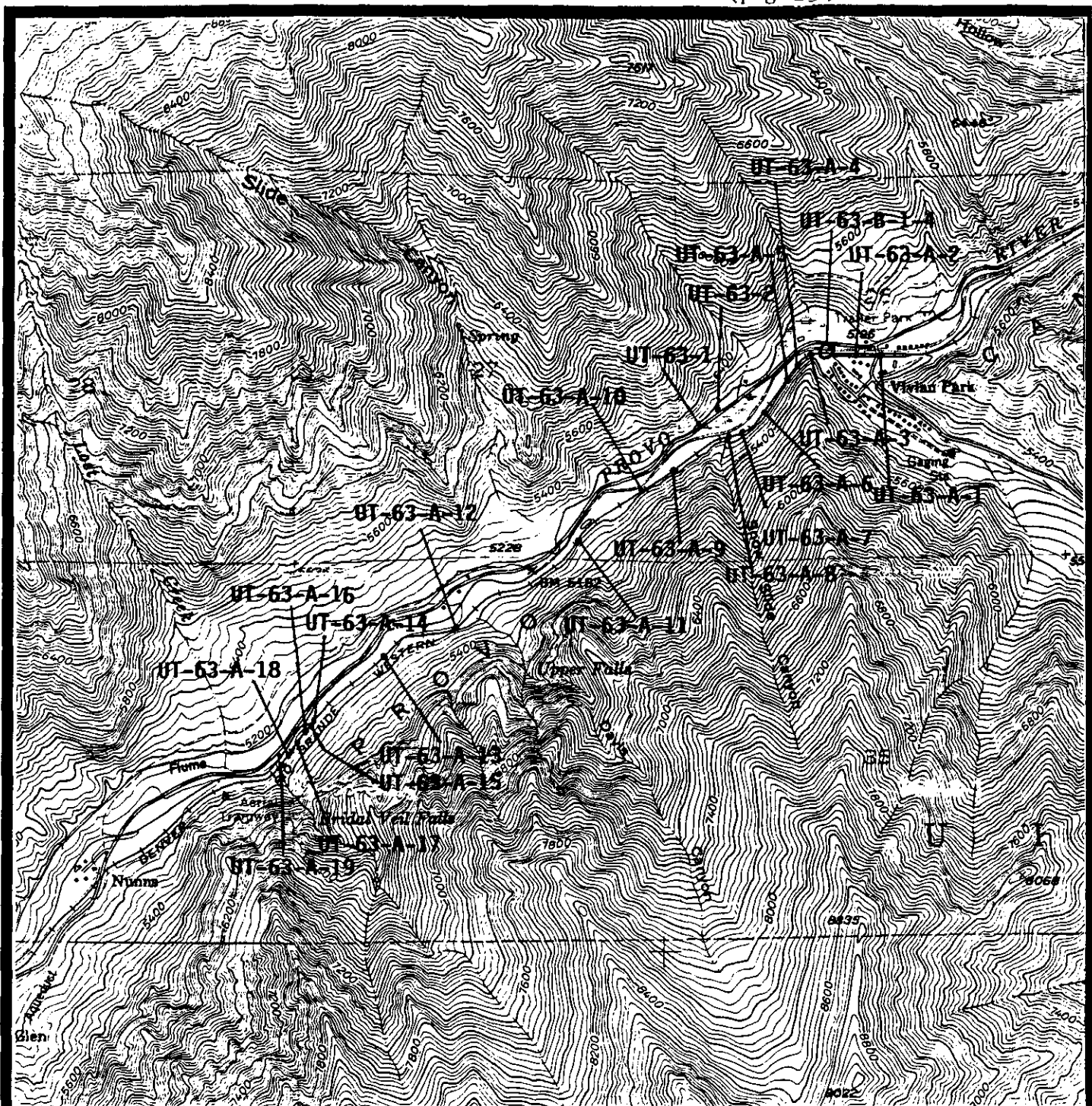
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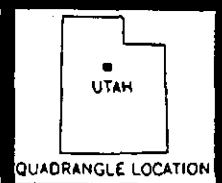
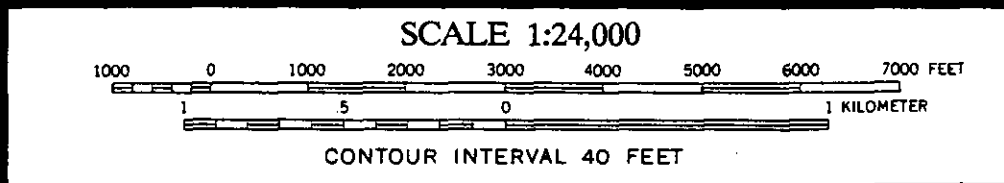
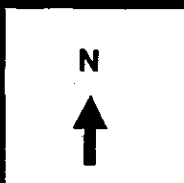
Route of Heber Creeper Railroad.



Bridal Veil Falls, UT (1948, 1969)
T5S, R3E, Salt Lake PM
Utah and Wasatch Counties

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Location of photographic points.